POSTMODERN PEDAGOGY: REWRITING THE RULES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

PEDAGOGIA PÓS-MODERNA: REESCREVER AS REGRAS DE APRENDIZAGEM E ENSINO

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ABSTRACT

Traditional education has long been built on modernist principles that emphasize objectivity, rationality, and hierarchical structures. However, postmodernist thought, particularly through the lens of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, challenges these foundational assumptions by revealing the inherent power dynamics, exclusions, and biases embedded within educational systems. This article critically examines how deconstruction can be applied to education to create more equitable, inclusive, and context-sensitive learning environments. By questioning dominant narratives, rethinking pedagogical approaches, decentralizing curricula, and integrating dialogic and digital methodologies, this paper argues for a transformation in education that moves beyond rigid, prescriptive frameworks. Through an exploration of philosophical perspectives and practical strategies, this study demonstrates how postmodern critiques can reshape education to be more adaptive, participatory, and socially just in the 21st century.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Deconstruction in Education, Dialogic Pedagogy, Educational Equity, Digital Learning, Critical Pedagogy.

RESUMO

A educação tradicional há muito tempo é construída sobre princípios modernistas que enfatizam objetividade, racionalidade e estruturas hierárquicas. No entanto, o pensamento pós-modernista, particularmente através das lentes da desconstrução de Jacques Derrida, desafia essas suposições fundamentais ao revelar a dinâmica de poder inerente, exclusões e preconceitos embutidos nos sistemas educacionais. Este artigo examina criticamente como a desconstrução pode ser aplicada à educação para criar ambientes de aprendizagem mais equitativos, inclusivos e sensíveis ao contexto. Ao questionar narrativas dominantes, repensar abordagens pedagógicas, descentralizar currículos e integrar metodologias dialógicas e digitais, este artigo argumenta por uma transformação na educação que vai além de estruturas rígidas e prescritivas. Por meio de uma exploração de perspectivas filosóficas e estratégias práticas, este estudo demonstra como as críticas pós-modernas podem remodelar a educação para ser mais adaptável, participativa e socialmente justa no século XXI.

Palavras-chave: Pós-modernismo, Desconstrução na Educação, Pedagogia Dialógica, Equidade Educacional, Aprendizagem Digital, Pedagogia Crítica.

Introduction

The philosophy of education has historically been shaped by modernist epistemological assumptions, which view knowledge as objective, linear, and cumulative (Habermas, 1987). Traditional education systems operate under the premise that knowledge is universally accessible, and that education serves as a neutral vehicle for its transmission. However, these ideals overlook the deeply embedded social, historical, and political factors that influence learning, often marginalizing diverse perspectives.

Postmodernist thought emerges as a critical response to these modernist assumptions, challenging the notion of knowledge as fixed, cohesive, and universally applicable. Instead, postmodernism, particularly through deconstruction, dismantles dominant narratives and binary structures that shape educational discourse. This perspective is increasingly relevant in contemporary debates on education, where there is a growing recognition of the need to refine and personalize teaching and learning processes.

At the heart of postmodernism is the assertion that knowledge is not merely a tool for intellectual advancement but is intrinsically linked to power structures, as emphasized by thinkers like Foucault and Lyotard. Rather than being confined to institutions, power circulates through them, making education a mechanism for maintaining societal hierarchies. Lyotard (1984) and Rorty (1989) encourage educators to challenge grand narratives, embrace diverse voices, and foster inclusive learning environments.

Derrida's deconstructive approach provides a methodological framework for interrogating these structures. His principle that "there is no outside-text" highlights the contextual nature of meaning and reveals how educational practices are shaped by underlying power relations. Traditional definitions of success and intelligence, often grounded in Eurocentrism, patriarchy, and classism, exclude marginalized perspectives. Deconstruction brings these biases to the forefront, making it possible to rethink education as a more inclusive and transformative process.

David Harvey (1992) contextualizes the emergence of postmodernism within the broader socio-economic shifts of late capitalism, globalization, and technological advancement. These changes have destabilized traditional educational paradigms, necessitating a re-evaluation of how knowledge is produced and disseminated. Scholars like Usher and Edwards (1994) argue that postmodernism offers a valuable framework for embracing complexity and multiplicity in education. They advocate for moving beyond rigid institutional structures toward a more reflexive, dialogic, and context-driven model of learning.

This paper explores the theoretical underpinnings of deconstruction in education and examines its practical implications. It argues that by fostering critical questioning, decentralizing curriculum design, and promoting dialogic pedagogy, education can be reimagined as a dynamic and inclusive practice. The discussion aligns with scholars such as Burbules (1995) and Paulo Freire (1970), who view education as a means of empowerment and transformation. Furthermore, the critique of educational commercialization, as highlighted by Stanley Aronowitz (1998), underscores the urgency of structural change to prevent education from perpetuating social injustices.

By integrating these perspectives, this study seeks to demonstrate how a deconstructive approach to education can advance equity, inclusion, and adaptability in the 21st century. It calls for a fundamental rethinking of educational models to create spaces that are not only responsive to the complexities of contemporary society but also actively challenge the inequities they produce.

Results and Discussion

Philosophical Foundations of Deconstruction

Deconstruction is not merely a method but a philosophical approach that challenges the idea of fixed meanings and hierarchical binaries (Derrida, 1976). Derrida's central premise is that language and meaning are inherently unstable, shaped by context, and perpetually open to reinterpretation. This insight is particularly relevant to education, where concepts such as "knowledge,"

"intelligence," and "success" are often treated as universal constants. Deconstruction problematizes these assumptions, revealing how they are historically and culturally contingent. Derrida's assertion that "every concept is necessarily and implicitly inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences" underscores the fluidity and interconnectedness of educational constructs (Derrida, 1976).

Educational institutions, often viewed as neutral arbiters of knowledge, become sites of critical inquiry under deconstruction. The question shifts from "what is knowledge?" to "whose knowledge is valued, and why?" Siegel, in his critique of postmodernism's role in education, emphasizes the need to balance critical inquiry with rational standards. While Siegel acknowledges the value of postmodern scepticism, he warns against abandoning the pursuit of reason and justification entirely. "While postmodern scepticism is vital, it must not wholly abandon the pursuit of reason and justification," he argues, suggesting a balanced approach that retains intellectual rigor (Siegel, 1988).

Carr provides an additional layer to this argument by advocating for a virtue-based approach to education. Carr emphasizes the cultivation of intellectual virtues such as critical thinking and ethical reflection, which enable learners to navigate the complexities of a postmodern world. "Education must ultimately aim not only at the deconstruction of flawed knowledge but also at the reconstruction of a coherent framework for ethical and intellectual development," Carr asserts, highlighting the importance of reconstruction alongside critique (Carr, 2003).

Burbules complements these perspectives by advocating for a pedagogy of "continuity of inquiry." He argues that education must strike a balance between questioning established norms and constructing new, meaningful practices. For Burbules, this continuity is essential for fostering a dynamic and adaptive educational environment (Burbules, 1995). Aronowitz extends the critique of education by examining its entanglement with capitalist imperatives. Aronowitz argues that "the commodification of knowledge within schools limits their transformative potential," suggesting that educational institutions often function as mechanisms for reproducing social hierarchies rather than as spaces for liberation

(Aronowitz, 1998). This critique aligns with Derrida's view that institutional practices often conceal and perpetuate power dynamics.

Harvey (1992) situates these critiques within the broader context of postmodernity, highlighting how globalization and cultural fragmentation have disrupted traditional modes of knowledge production and dissemination. Harvey's analysis underscores the need for education to adapt to these transformations while remaining critical of the inequalities they produce. For example, the rise of digital technologies and global networks demands new pedagogical approaches that value flexibility and inclusivity. Usher and Edwards (1994) contribute to this discourse by emphasizing the importance of embracing multiplicity and diversity in educational practices. They argue that rigid structures and standardized curricula are increasingly ill-suited to the demands of a complex and interconnected world. Instead, they propose an educational model that values reflexivity, dialogue, and the co-construction of knowledge, enabling learners to engage critically with their environments.

Foucault's analysis of power further deepens the philosophical foundation of deconstruction in education. Foucault demonstrates how power relations shape what is considered valid knowledge and whose voices are amplified or marginalized within educational systems. His assertion that "knowledge is not for knowing; knowledge is for cutting" underscores the instrumental role of knowledge in maintaining societal hierarchies (Foucault, 1977). Similarly, Lyotard critiques the dominance of grand narratives in education, advocating for a focus on localized, pluralistic understandings of knowledge (Lyotard, 1984).

Spivak enriches this conversation by highlighting the importance of representing marginalized perspectives in education. Spivak's concept of "epistemic violence"—the exclusion of non-dominant ways of knowing—challenges educators to critically examine whose voices are heard and whose are silenced (Spivak, 1993). By incorporating these perspectives, deconstruction moves beyond critique to actively reconstruct educational practices in ways that value diversity and inclusion. Together, these philosophical foundations provide a robust framework for deconstructing education. They challenge traditional assumptions, expose

embedded power dynamics, and open new possibilities for creating an equitable, inclusive, and dynamic educational landscape. As education continues to evolve in response to societal changes, these insights remain crucial for guiding its transformation.

Practical Strategies for Deconstructing Education in the 21st Century

The deconstruction of education in the 21st century necessitates practical strategies that challenge entrenched paradigms while fostering inclusivity, reflexivity, and adaptability. By applying deconstructionist principles to educational structures, pedagogy, and curricula, stakeholders can create more equitable and dynamic learning environments. Postmodernist thought encourages a radical re-alignment of educational practices and curricula, particularly in early childhood education. Wilkinson argues that the focus should shift from an individualistic approach to one that emphasizes social contexts, critical awareness, and social justice (Wilkinson, 2023). This aligns with the postmodern critique of essentialism, which posits that traditional educational frameworks often reproduce socio-economic inequalities. Slott highlights that critical postmodernists advocate for an anti-essentialist approach, arguing that conventional theories of education fail to account for the complexities of social dynamics (Slott, 2002). Thus, deconstructing education through a postmodern lens can facilitate a more equitable and socially responsible educational framework.

Decentralizing the curriculum is a key strategy for achieving postmodernist goals in education, as it aligns with the principles of inclusivity, diversity, and local relevance. This approach challenges traditional, centralized educational frameworks that often impose a one-size-fits-all model, thereby allowing for a more flexible and responsive educational system. One of the primary advantages of decentralizing the curriculum is the ability to tailor educational content to local contexts and needs. Dewi highlights that curriculum reform under decentralization in Indonesia has positively impacted student achievements, particularly when teachers are adequately prepared to implement these reforms Dewi (2021). This finding underscores the importance of localizing the curriculum to reflect the

cultural and social realities of students, which is a fundamental aspect of postmodern educational philosophy. Similarly, Hadi et al. emphasize the significance of local content in vocational education, noting that a curriculum that incorporates local knowledge and skills can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Hadi et al., 2019). Moreover, Rød and Bæck discuss how decentralization allows local stakeholders, such as teachers and community members, to influence curriculum decisions. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and relevance in the educational process, as local interests and needs are considered (Rød & Bæck, 2020). The authors argue that in a decentralized system, local school boards can negotiate curriculum changes, which can lead to a more dynamic and contextually appropriate educational experience. This aligns with postmodernist goals of recognizing diverse perspectives and valuing local knowledge.

Traditional curricula often reflect dominant cultural narratives, prioritizing Eurocentric perspectives while marginalizing alternative epistemologies. To counteract this, educators must embrace decentralized curricula that incorporate diverse cultural, historical, and epistemological frameworks. For example, integrating indigenous ecological knowledge into science curricula can offer students a broader understanding of environmental stewardship, challenging Western-centric paradigms (Battiste, 2000). This approach fosters global competence and respect for cultural plurality. Moreover, decentralization extends to interdisciplinary approaches, breaking down silos between subjects to encourage holistic learning. By integrating history, literature, and the arts with STEM disciplines, students develop critical thinking skills and a nuanced understanding of complex global challenges.

Reforming assessment practices is a critical strategy for deconstructing traditional educational paradigms, particularly as education evolves to meet the demands of the 21st century. One significant aspect of assessment reform is the shift from traditional standardized testing to more authentic and equitable assessment methods. Wiggins argues that authentic assessments replicate real-world challenges and standards of performance, thereby providing a more accurate

measure of students' abilities and knowledge Wiggins (2011). This approach aligns with educational goals that prioritize diverse learning styles and contexts, moving away from one-size-fits-all assessments that often disadvantage marginalized students.

Standardized testing, a hallmark of modern education, often fails to capture the multifaceted nature of learning. Deconstruction advocates for alternative assessment methods that prioritize critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Project-based learning, reflective portfolios, and peer assessments shift the focus from rote memorization to meaningful engagement. Burbules (1995) calls for "reflective equilibrium" in assessment practices, allowing for continuous adaptation to learners' needs and contexts. For instance, assessments that include community-based projects enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world problems, bridging the gap between classroom learning and societal impact.

Empowering teachers as co-creators is a vital strategy for deconstructing traditional educational paradigms. This approach not only enhances teacher agency but also fosters collaborative environments that can lead to more meaningful and relevant educational experiences for students. One of the key arguments for empowering teachers as co-creators is that it enhances their professional identity and engagement. Hattie emphasizes that when educators focus on understanding their impact on student learning, they can maximize educational outcomes Hattie (2015). This reflective practice encourages teachers to take ownership of their teaching methods and curricular decisions, thereby fostering a sense of agency that is crucial for effective teaching. By involving teachers in the co-creation of curricula and assessments, educational institutions can cultivate a more dynamic and responsive learning environment.

The hierarchical relationship between teachers and students must be reevaluated. Teachers should not merely disseminate prepackaged knowledge but act as co-creators of learning experiences alongside their students. Freire's (1970) concept of dialogic pedagogy emphasizes the importance of collaboration, where teachers and students engage in mutual inquiry. By fostering a participatory learning environment, teachers empower students to take ownership of their

education. This approach encourages learners to question assumptions, develop their voices, and contribute meaningfully to discussions. It also demands professional development opportunities that equip teachers with the skills to facilitate such dynamic interactions.

Leveraging technology for equity is indeed a crucial strategy for deconstructing traditional educational paradigms in the 21st century. The integration of technology into educational practices not only enhances learning outcomes but also addresses systemic inequities that have historically marginalized certain student populations. One of the primary benefits of leveraging technology is its potential to bridge the digital divide, which has been exacerbated by socio-economic disparities. Timotheou et al. highlight that the effective use of digital technologies can significantly impact educational outcomes, particularly when schools develop their digital capacity Timotheou et al. (2022). This capacity-building is essential for ensuring that all students have equitable access to learning resources and opportunities. Similarly, Eden emphasizes that leveraging technology not only enhances learning outcomes but also promotes equity in education, underscoring the importance of inclusive strategies (Eden, 2024). Furthermore, the integration of technology into teacher education is critical for preparing educators to address the needs of diverse learners. Durham discusses how preservice teachers can develop their Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) by focusing on technological equity, particularly for multilingual learners (Durham, 2024). This focus equips future educators with the skills necessary to create inclusive learning environments that leverage technology to meet the needs of all students.

Digital technologies have transformed the educational landscape, offering opportunities to democratize access to knowledge. Open Educational Resources (OER) and online learning platforms provide marginalized communities with tools to overcome geographic and economic barriers. However, technology must be used thoughtfully to avoid perpetuating existing inequalities. Blake et al. (1998) argue for the critical use of technology to create spaces of dialogue and inquiry. For example, virtual classrooms can facilitate cross-cultural exchanges, exposing students to

diverse perspectives. Additionally, adaptive learning technologies can personalize educational content, addressing individual learners' strengths and weaknesses.

Institutional reform and policy advocacy are essential components for realizing a deconstruction of education, particularly in the context of contemporary educational challenges. These strategies facilitate the transformation of educational systems to be more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners. Systemic transformation requires policy changes that prioritize equity and inclusion. Institutions must dismantle hierarchical structures that reinforce social inequalities and adopt policies that promote diversity in leadership, faculty, and student representation. Aronowitz (1998) critiques the commodification of education, urging institutions to resist market-driven imperatives. Policy advocacy should focus on funding public education, reducing disparities in resource allocation, and supporting community-based educational initiatives. These reforms create conditions for more equitable and inclusive learning environments.

Fostering dialogic classrooms is essential for deconstructing traditional educational environments, particularly within a postmodern context. Dialogic pedagogy emphasizes the importance of dialogue in the learning process, allowing students to engage in collaborative meaning-making and critical reflection. This approach aligns with postmodernist principles that challenge established norms and promote inclusivity and diversity in educational settings. One of the primary benefits of dialogic teaching is its ability to enhance communication and reflective skills among students. This improvement is crucial in a postmodern educational environment where critical thinking and reflection are necessary for navigating complex social realities. Similarly, focusing on dialogue as a core practice in teacher education can help develop a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of cultural, material, and social dimensions of teaching (Edwards-Groves & Hoare, 2012). This understanding is essential for fostering a more inclusive and responsive educational environment. the role of productive classroom talk in promoting high-level comprehension is underscored by Murphy et al., who assert that engaging students in argumentation and discourse is vital for developing critical-analytic

thinking skills (Murphy et al., 2018). This aligns with the postmodern emphasis on questioning dominant narratives and encouraging diverse perspectives.

Dialogic pedagogy, rooted in the principles of deconstruction, emphasizes dialogue over monologue, fostering a culture of critical engagement. In dialogic classrooms, students and teachers collaboratively construct knowledge, questioning assumptions and exploring multiple perspectives. Foucault's insights into power dynamics are particularly relevant here. Dialogic classrooms disrupt traditional hierarchies, empowering students to challenge dominant narratives and contribute their unique perspectives. Activities such as Socratic seminars and peer-led discussions exemplify this approach, creating spaces where all voices are valued. Furthermore, dialogic teaching has been shown to promote cultural literacy and empathy among students. García-Milà et al. argue that dialogic pedagogy can help students overcome stereotypes and prejudices, fostering a more inclusive classroom environment (García-Milà et al., 2021). This is particularly relevant in diverse educational settings, where understanding and appreciating different perspectives are crucial for social cohesion. The ability to engage in dialogue about differing viewpoints prepares students for active participation in democratic societies, a key tenet of postmodern education. In conclusion, fostering dialogic classrooms is essential for deconstructing traditional educational paradigms and creating inclusive, reflective, and critical learning environments. By emphasizing dialogue, educators can promote communication skills, critical thinking, and cultural literacy, all of which are vital for navigating the complexities of contemporary society.

Integrating local and global perspectives into educational frameworks is increasingly recognized as an effective strategy for deconstructing traditional educational paradigms. This approach not only enriches the curriculum but also prepares students to navigate and engage with the complexities of a globalized world. One significant aspect of integrating local and global perspectives is the enhancement of global citizenship education. Nanthawong argues that social studies curricula must incorporate global contexts and trends to prepare students for 21st-century citizenship, which encompasses local, national, and international dimensions Nanthawong (2024). This perspective aligns with the need for

education to promote justice, equality, and diversity, thereby encouraging thoughtful engagement and decision-making among students. Moreover, the emergence of critical approaches to global citizenship education challenges traditional neoliberal and humanist frameworks. Wet notes that these critical perspectives advocate for a deeper understanding of global citizenship that includes addressing issues of power, privilege, and social justice (Wet, 2024). This shift is essential for developing a more nuanced and inclusive approach to education that recognizes the interconnectedness of local and global issues. Akçay further supports this notion by highlighting the role of global citizenship education in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which necessitate an understanding of multiple perspectives and the complexities of global challenges (Akçay, 2024).

Education must prepare students to navigate an interconnected world while remaining rooted in local contexts. Usher and Edwards (1994) emphasize the importance of balancing global awareness with cultural specificity. This can be achieved by incorporating local histories, traditions, and languages into curricula alongside global themes. For example, teaching climate change through the lens of local environmental challenges enables students to connect abstract concepts to their lived experiences. Similarly, fostering partnerships between schools in different countries can promote cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.

Encouraging lifelong learning is increasingly recognized as a critical component in the deconstruction of traditional educational frameworks. Lifelong learning, defined as the continuous, self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional development, plays a pivotal role in fostering adaptability, critical thinking, and self-directed learning among individuals. One of the primary benefits of lifelong learning is its potential to enhance individual competence and professional effectiveness. Deconstruction recognizes that learning is a lifelong process, extending beyond formal education. Educational systems should cultivate habits of curiosity, critical thinking, and adaptability that empower individuals to continue learning throughout their lives. Lifelong learning initiatives, such as community education programs and online courses, ensure that education remains accessible and relevant in a rapidly changing world.

The promotion of social justice and equity within educational frameworks is increasingly recognized as a vital component in the deconstruction of traditional educational paradigms. This approach aligns with postmodernist views that challenge established norms and advocate for inclusivity and critical awareness in educational practices. By fostering social justice, educators can dismantle oppressive structures and create a more equitable learning environment. Education must be a tool for social transformation. By addressing systemic inequalities and fostering a commitment to justice, schools can empower students to become agents of change. This involves embedding social justice themes into curricula, such as exploring issues of race, gender, and economic inequality through critical inquiry. Spivak's concept of "epistemic violence" underscores the importance of amplifying marginalized voices. Incorporating diverse perspectives into educational content challenges dominant paradigms and promotes a more equitable understanding of the world.

Conclusion

Deconstructing education through a postmodern philosophical lens offers a path toward a more equitable, inclusive, and dynamic learning environment. By challenging entrenched assumptions, embracing plurality, and fostering critical inquiry, this approach aligns education with the complexities of a diverse and interconnected world (Lyotard, 1984; Derrida, 1976). As Derrida stated, "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself," underscoring the necessity of this approach in education. Siegel's call for a balanced critique reminds us that while deconstruction challenges traditional norms, it must also maintain coherence and aim for justifiable outcomes (Siegel, 1988). Carr's emphasis on the reconstruction of ethical and intellectual frameworks highlights the need for an education that nurtures critical virtues alongside scepticism (Carr, 2003). Burbules' advocacy for "continuity of inquiry" reinforces the necessity of constructing flexible yet meaningful educational practices (Burbules, 1995). Aronowitz's critique of the commodification and

hegemony within educational systems further highlights the need for radical transformation (Aronowitz, 1998). Harvey's (1992) analysis of cultural fragmentation in postmodernity provides essential insights for aligning education with the needs of a rapidly changing world. Finally, Blake et al. (1998) remind us that education after postmodernism must embrace uncertainty, reflexivity, and dialogue to create a system that is both equitable and intellectually vibrant. While not without its challenges, the philosophical foundations of deconstruction provide a robust framework for rethinking and reshaping education for the 21st century and beyond.

As emphasized in the paper, deconstructing education in the 21st century requires a multifaceted approach that blends critique with innovation. By decentralizing curricula, reforming assessments, empowering teachers, leveraging technology, and fostering dialogic classrooms, education can become more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to societal needs. These strategies align with the philosophical foundations of deconstruction, creating a dynamic framework for reimagining education in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Central to this endeavour is the recognition that education is not a static entity but a living process that evolves alongside societal changes. It demands continuous reflection and adaptation, ensuring that it remains relevant and inclusive in addressing the diverse realities of learners. The deconstructive lens not only exposes the inherent biases and power structures within traditional educational systems but also offers pathways to reconstruct them in ways that celebrate plurality and foster critical engagement.

Moreover, deconstructing education challenges educators, policymakers, and institutions to embrace uncertainty and fluidity, moving away from rigid frameworks that prioritize standardization and conformity. Instead, this approach calls for an educational landscape where learners are equipped to navigate and contribute to an increasingly interconnected world. Such an education cultivates empathy, creativity, and a commitment to social justice, empowering individuals to address pressing global challenges while remaining rooted in their unique cultural and personal contexts.

While the journey toward a deconstructed educational system may encounter resistance and practical obstacles, it offers a compelling vision for the future. By questioning entrenched assumptions and embracing the complexities of the human experience, education can fulfil its transformative potential. It becomes not merely a means of imparting knowledge but a profound process of fostering understanding, equity, and the shared pursuit of a better, more inclusive world. The principles outlined in this discussion provide both the inspiration and the practical tools to embark on this transformative journey, ensuring that education remains a force for empowerment and equity in the 21st century and beyond.

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